



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

400 Yesler Building Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 625-4501

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

Name and Address of Property: Hiawatha Playfield
2700 California Avenue, S.W.

Legal Description: Land was not platted. It is bordered by S.W. Lander Street on the north, S.W. Stevens Street on the south, California Avenue, S.W. on the west and Walnut Avenue, S.W. on the east.

At the Public Hearing held on June 6, 1984, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Hiawatha Playfield as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the Landmarks Preservation Ordinance #106348.

Section 3.01(3): It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation; and,

Section 3.01(5): It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder.

"A new era in public recreation in Seattle and in the Pacific Northwest was opened with the Dedication (in 1911) of the Recreation Center on Hiawatha Playfield."-Seattle Park Board. This was the first "Field House" (as they were known then) to be built in the city and the northwest and "places Seattle in a class with the East": Philadelphia, Cincinnati and Chicago, the leading exponents of this type of building for indoor, wintertime recreation.

Seattle was brought into this "mainstream" of ideas largely by the Olmsted Bros. Landscape Architects, of Brookline (Boston), when the Park Board hired them in 1903 to prepare a Comprehensive System of Parks and Parkways in Seattle. The hiring of this nationally famous team was possible as part of the celebration planned by the City - the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Expo staged in 1909

to celebrate the great prosperity that the Klondike Gold Rush at 1897 brought to the City. The Olmsteds were hired to design the Expo Grounds. Th 1903 Report of the Olmsteds was concerned with the acquisition of a broad system of parkways and parks while the land was still available in natural beauty and in acquisition costs. In 1907 five districts - including the Town of West Seattle - had been annexed to Seattle, so the Olmsteds were commissioned to prepare a Supplemental Report for these areas in 1908.

Under the pressure of the "new" communities for new playgrounds, the 1908 Olmsted Report had given top priority for playground siting to West Seattle and Ballard. So the Board went "all out" and chose the West Seattle site across from the West Seattle School. The Olmsted firm was retained to develop plans for 37 individual parks and playgrounds in Seattle, one of which was Hiawatha in 1911 to become the largest public playfield in Seattle as well as having the first Field House.

The playfield design and the concept of playfields was a radically new direction when the Olmsted office designed Hiawatha and marked a change in attitudes by adults towards the health benefits of recreation on children, both physically and mentally.

The elements of the playfield in 1984 are essentially the same as those shown on the 1910-1911 plans. The structure of the tree and shrub plantings is almost intact with occasional removal and infill.

While the layout of the recreation elements is essentially the same, the landscape plant layout is installed to the original plan. The Parks Department print is pencilled with dimensions, indicating that the location of trees was meticulously followed in the original planting.

Features of the Landmark to be preserved include:

The Hiawatha Playfield only.

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By:



Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Donald Harris

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